

## A TRUMPET IN THE MORNING

This is the first program devoted entirely to the orchestral music of Marty Ehrlich. It displays the characteristics that have marked his success as an instrumentalist, composer, and bandleader: strong melodic invention and a keen ear for instrumental color, creative curiosity embracing disciplines beyond music, extreme sensitivity to those with whom he collaborates, formal inventiveness that enhances rather than obscures expressive intent, and an unblinking yet ultimately affirmative insistence on connecting his music with realities both historic and contemporary.

Marty Ehrlich was born in St. Paul, Minnesota on May 31, 1955, and raised in Louisville, Kentucky, where he began playing clarinet. When he was in the fifth grade, his family moved to University City, Missouri, a suburb in the process of becoming St. Louis' first multi-racial community, rich with artists and progressive political thought. The environment was ideal for nurturing Ehrlich's creative talents, and as a teenager he began writing poetry and continued clarinet studies with members of the St. Louis Symphony. A weekend arts program brought him into contact with the musicians, painters, and poets who formed the Black Artists Group (BAG), an interdisciplinary collective similar in intent to Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Music (AACM). The influence of BAG members Julius Hemphill, Oliver Lake, and J.D. Parran led Ehrlich to begin focusing on studying the saxophone and to immerse himself in both the traditions and the innovations of improvised music.

"One of the great things about meeting the BAG guys was being urged to learn the history of the music," Ehrlich emphasizes. "It made me much more of a polyglot." The encounter also instilled a philosophy that has informed all of his work. "I call myself a pan-stylist who doesn't believe in musical styles," he explains. "My inspirations are often conceptual rather than 'styles' I'm trying to write in. I reject the notion, especially in jazz, that there is only one language to use, and my music is not a comment on style. I like the resonance of contrasting sections, and will use musical style for contrast, but from the inside."

Ehrlich's conception was nurtured further at the New England Conservatory of Music, where he received a Bachelor's Degree. He studied instrumental technique with Joseph Allard and jazz and creative improvisation with Jaki Byard, George Russell, Joe Maneri, and Ran Blake, while also benefitting from the vision that NEC president Gunther Schuller had brought to the school. The uncommon range and consistency of Ehrlich's work on various clarinets, saxophones and flutes served him well when he moved to New York in 1978, and he quickly became a valued member of ensembles led by AACM luminaries Muhal Richard Abrams, Anthony Braxton, Leroy Jenkins, Roscoe Mitchell, and Wadada Leo Smith as well as his former teachers Byard and Russell. In addition to participating in some of the period's most innovative music, the diverse experience also provided insights into leading a large ensemble that influenced his approach to the present music.

"A real difference between this recording and my previous albums is that I'm conducting and producing rather than playing," Ehrlich says. "This was partly practical, since there was a lot to get through in the studio, but it also seemed right for this music. On my first European tour, with Anthony Braxton in 1978, he just conducted, because he said the music needed someone outside of it to give it shape. George Russell and Muhal Richard Abrams are other great composers who also took this approach. Another thing that impressed me about Anthony on that first tour was how hard he listened to everybody else. I saw a similar role here: to listen and bring out certain

things, to maximize the creativity in the room.”

In 1984, Ehrlich began recording under his own name and quickly established a singular profile. With his rich, centered sound and technical facility on several saxophones, clarinets, and flutes, he was acknowledged as a true multi-instrumental master who could express himself without restriction on everything he plays. His compositions married song-like melody, a thoroughgoing knowledge of jazz’s rhythmic and structural heritage and newer concepts of formal and textural development. Ehrlich also revealed a knack for assembling uncommon performing units that underscored his individual talents, several of which he has sustained over the subsequent decades. These include *Traveler’s Tales*, a quartet in which he shared the front line with Stan Strickland, a complementary multi-instrumental master; the *Dark Woods Ensemble*, a chamber trio in which his clarinets, cello, and bass have been reinforced by sympathetic guest artists; the cooperative trios *Relativity* (with bassist Michael Formanek and drummer Peter Erskine) and *C/D/E* (with bassist Mark Dresser and drummer Andrew Cyrille); and duos with both bassists (John Lindberg, Anthony Cox) and pianists (Abrams, Myra Melford). Ehrlich also established a continuing presence in three important midsize ensembles led by composers no longer with us: the *Julius Hemphill Saxophone Sextet* (for which he assumed leadership after Hemphill’s death), the *John Carter Octet*, and the *Andrew Hill Sextet*.

While Ehrlich had written earlier pieces for larger ensembles including the *New York Composers Orchestra*, his most ambitious documented opus prior to the present collection was *The Long View*, created in 2000 in collaboration with painter Oliver Jackson. The various movements of that work were scored for between two and fourteen musicians. Here, in contrast, the canvas remains large, though again it is mutable. Most of the 24 musicians involved have extensive histories with Ehrlich, who emphasizes that such personnel choices as the use of two rhythm sections were made “to enlist their individual approaches in giving the recording an even wider palette.” He also says that the recording realizes “an inner compulsion to reveal the relationships among the pieces, the majority of which were written in the past decade and are long-form and multi-sectional. They share an intention, and are really my own music.”

**M Variations (Melody for Madeleine)** is the oldest piece. Originally written for his young daughter and recorded in 1989 by his *Traveler’s Tales* quartet, it was expanded in 1992 for the *New York Composers Orchestra*. In its revised version, the piece functions as a piano concerto with a pyramid structure and contrasting rhythmic elements. The original melody is frequently recast within the orchestra, and primary soloist Uri Caine’s part has written passages as well as a central improvisation built upon chord changes. “In each piece I work to find an improvisational context that will galvanize the players, and simultaneously extend the writing,” Ehrlich comments. “Here, I wrote changes without a melody, leaving melodic invention to the soloists, and Uri and the others did a beautiful job.”

**A Trumpet in the Morning** was commissioned by the *Sound Vision Orchestra* in 2004. It connects directly with Ehrlich’s formative years in setting a poem by Arthur Brown (1948–1982) as a concerto for J.D. Parran, who narrates as well as being featured on both soprano and bass saxophones. “Writing poetry made me want to be an artist even before I decided to pursue music,” Ehrlich emphasizes, “and I’ve been aware of this poem since I was quite young. I didn’t know Arthur Brown—he wasn’t a joiner, and never became part of the BAG—but I heard him read the poem once, and he was a good friend of J.D.’s. Some of my earliest musical experiences were playing to accompany poetry, roots I share with J.D.”

Ehrlich generated the composition out of the poem's first line. "My process tends to involve getting hooked on one idea and going from there. Here, I sat with the poem, broke it into sections, then began by writing a melody for the poem's refrain, 'You can bury me in the East, You can bury me in the West. . .,' which Arthur Brown took from a spiritual that W.E.B. DuBois quotes in *The Souls of Black Folks*. Once I had the basic melody, I began to sound paint, with the intent of blending the voice and ensemble in different ways so that there would be sections where one improvised while the other did not." There are sections of great detail and urgency, and an overall mood of celebration. A few unexpected developments took place during the recording, such as the way Parran's reading bled over James Weidman's piano cadenza, which emphasizes Ehrlich's point that "the piece is never finished when it's put down on paper."

**Rundowns and Turnbacks** began life in 2007 as a piece for Ehrlich's Dark Woods Ensemble before it was expanded in 2012. The title comes from bluesman Johnny Shines' description of Robert Johnson's guitar playing. "I took the title as a metaphor for American life, not as a collage but as a prism, evoking themes both personal and political," says Ehrlich. The primary melodic material is stated in the opening "The Ship on the Corner" by trumpeter Ron Horton and Ehrlich on clarinet (his only appearance as a player on the album), then developed in subsequent sections that conjure such diverse forms as country blues, waltz, and Irish jig. "Didn't Know the Levees Would Break" takes its title from George W. Bush's comment after Hurricane Katrina ("My reaction to that was, 'Haven't you heard all of those blues?'" Ehrlich notes) and "Sugar for Sugar," in marked contrast, from Bob Dylan's song of warning, "Crash on the Levee (Down in the Flood)." "Quaker Work Song" acknowledges a fondly remembered St. Louis family. "I was thinking American archetypes," says Ehrlich, a notion extended by the solos that enliven each section.

**Blues for Peace** (2009) was commissioned by the Montalvo Arts Center in Saratoga, California for a high school jazz orchestra. The more conventional nature of the commission underscores Ehrlich's penchant for challenge and individuality in everything he writes. He begins with a funky opening passage that was initially considered for inclusion in "Rundowns and Turnbacks," then employs a 9/8 meter and withholds the anticipated blues modulations. "Like several of my pieces, this is in the long tradition of taking the basic blues sensibility and stretching out the form in one way or another," Ehrlich says. "It didn't really work as part of the original 'Rundowns,' but orchestrating it made all of the difference. The nine beats are counted 'Taki-Taki-Taki-Gamela,' to use the helpful phrases Karl Berger teaches."

**Agbekor Translations** (2012), the most recent composition, was written for a collaboration between the Hampshire College Jazz Improvisers Orchestra, which Ehrlich directs, and the Mt. Holyoke College West African Drumming Ensemble, directed by Faith Conant. Ehrlich based the piece upon six interlocking rhythms from the *agbekor* dance performed by the Ewe people of Ghana. Each rhythm provided a basis for a melody, which Ehrlich then spread throughout the orchestra. While the dance, and the composition, are usually extended, it appears here as prelude and postlude to the program. "It can go on all day," Ehrlich admits, "but for the recording I broke it into two processions. The disc is a space we're entering into. 'Agbekor' leads you in and brings you out, dancing I hope, on both sides."

—Bob Blumenthal

*Author and music critic Bob Blumenthal is a two-time Grammy winner for album notes. His most recent book, with photographer John Abbott, is Saxophone Colossus: A Portrait of Sonny Rollins (Abrams).*

## **a trumpet in the morning**

you can bury me in the east you can  
bury me in the west  
i'm gonna rise up be a trumpet  
in the morning cause  
i been bent in the forge been struck  
by the hammer been scorched by fire so  
be a trumpet this morning  
(o dont touch my shoes  
o let 'em shine let 'em shine)  
i been all night  
in the dew  
john-revelated in the marshy bottoms  
lazarused in the crook of a willow whittled  
a gospel-boat from a simple reed  
launched that skiff in the spittle  
of a mule's jaw  
gouged a skysong from the black giant's thigh  
and shackled it to a cotton flower  
o i freighted all my sorrows (o these is florsheim shoes  
all bright with dew) and i feels like noah  
riding these ankle-boats on god's stony waters  
and i feels like doves in my ear-lobes fetching freedom-sound  
in a single green leaf from dry land  
feels like glory walking in the blues  
tenfingers ten centipedal toes  
trebling jubilee from an acoustic crotch  
steel and catgut i say i feels  
unstrung  
like a broken guitar but  
be a trumpet soon this morning (o dont touch my clothes  
i'm gonna sit on a rainbow seat) o my wings is sprouted out  
wings is sprouted  
and i feels like mating bird's mother this morning  
in the middle of the air  
o i been over matched by salvation done broke the rock  
of living waters done founded a home in that water shed  
done looped the promise-harness round my shoulders  
(o dont touch my clothes  
cause i'm a sin-bright-standing-pat-jb-stetson-hat-initials-  
carved-in-the-back-of-my-shirt-umbrellaed-in-hallelujahs-man  
and jackodiamond-hard-to-play  
got one eye to see and one to believe  
a hellhound on my breath  
a crossroad in my breast

stone in my passway  
i'm accelerating  
and i feels like whiskey talkin rye) o i feels like blowing  
my lonesome horn this morning  
cause i woke up this morning  
more than something on my mind  
holy ghost shining down  
i aint nothing but love nothing but love  
o i feels so injected this morning so strung-out  
justa justa whole saharas of loving  
is what i'm talking bout  
like a flaming desert flower feels like  
i'm sipping in the sand  
(now tell me did you ever ever ever see  
a possum at rehearsal  
or a raccoon steal away now watch me  
steal  
away)  
o i got a feeling down deep i  
be a trumpet soon-in-the-morning  
be a trumpet soon-in-the-morning

—Arthur Brown

**Marty Ehrlich** is celebrating thirty-five years in the nexus of creative music centered in New York City. He began his musical career in St. Louis, Missouri, while in high school, performing and recording with the Human Arts Ensemble. He graduated from the New England Conservatory of Music with honors in 1977, where his teachers included George Russell, Jaki Byard, Joseph Allard, and Gunther Schuller.

Since that time, he has made twenty-five recordings of his compositions for ensembles ranging in size from duo to jazz orchestra. These groups include his Emergency Peace Ensemble, Traveler's Tales Group, Rites Quartet, and the Marty Ehrlich Sextet. He has recorded a CD-length work for twenty-two musicians entitled *The Long View*, and has two acclaimed recordings in Tzadik's Radical Jewish Culture series.

As a multi-instrumentalist passionate about improvisation and interpretation, he has performed with a who's who of contemporary composers including Muhal Richard Abrams, Ray Anderson, Steven Bernstein, Anthony Braxton, John Carter, Andrew Cyrille, Jack DeJohnette, Anthony Davis, Mark Dresser, Peter Erskine, Michael Formanek, Don Grolnick, Chico Hamilton, Julius Hemphill, Andrew Hill, Wayne Horvitz, Robin Holcomb, Leroy Jenkins, Myra Melford, James Newton, Bobby Previte, David Schiff, Wadada Leo Smith, and John Zorn. He appears on more than 100 recordings with these and other composers.

Ehrlich has performed with the Chicago Symphony, the BBC Symphony, the New York City Opera, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Chamber Music Northwest, and other classical ensembles. He has worked with the Jose Limón and Bill T. Jones dance companies,

among others. He is currently presenting a concert program for twelve musicians entitled “Julius Hemphill: A Composer Portrait.” His honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship in Composition, the Peter Ivers Visiting Artist Residency at Harvard University, composition grants from Chamber Music America, the NEA, and NYFA, “Clarinetist of the Year” from the Jazz Journalist Association, and a Distinguished Alumni award from NEC. He is currently Associate Professor of Jazz and Contemporary Music at Hampshire College. [www.martyehrllich.com](http://www.martyehrllich.com)

**J.D. Parran** is a charter member of the St. Louis Black Artists Group and an internationally known artist. He has premiered and recorded Anthony Davis’s clarinet concerto, *You Have the Right to Remain Silent*, with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project. He has performed at New York’s Vision Festival with Edward Kidd Jordan, Amiri Baraka, and Joseph Jarman; Skopje Jazz Festival (Macedonia) with Cecil Taylor and the SoundVision Orchestra; the San Jose Jazz Festival; and Miller Theater, and has had a long collaboration with Stephen Haynes and Shirley LeFlore (JD Parran & Spirit Stage). Recent projects include Ensemble Helacious (Peter Zummo and Kevin Norton), Don Byron, James Jabbo Ware, Anthony Braxton, Julius Hemphill, Oliver Lake, William Hooker, Earl Howard, Wadada Leo Smith, Lena Horne, Stevie Wonder, The Band, and Paul Simon, among others. He teaches at BMCC–City University of New York, Brooklyn College, and the Greenwich House Music School. His most recent releases on the Mutable Music label are the collaborative *Particle Ensemble* and the solo *Window Spirits*.

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

*At Dr. King’s Table*. The Julius Hemphill Sextet. New World Records 80524-2.

*Can You Hear a Motion*. Marty Ehrlich’s Traveler’s Tales. Enja 80522.

*Frog Leg Logic*. Marty Ehrlich Rites Quartet. Clean Feed 242CD.

*Fables*. Marty Ehrlich, reeds; Hankus Netsky, piano and accordion; Marcus Rojas, tuba; Jerome Harris, bass guitar. Tzadik TZA 8195

*Hear You Say*. The Ray Anderson/Marty Ehrlich Quartet. Intuition 71303.

*Just Before the Dawn*. Marty Ehrlich’s Dark Woods Ensemble. New World Records 80474-2.

*The Long View*. Marty Ehrlich Large Ensemble. Enja/Justin Time 3308-2.

*Malinke’s Dance*. Marty Ehrlich’s Traveler’s Tales. Omnitone 12003.

*News on the Rail*. The Marty Ehrlich Sextet. Palmetto PM 2113.

*Sojourn*. Marty Ehrlich’s Dark Woods Ensemble. Tzadik TZ 7136.

*Spark!* Marty Ehrlich, reeds; Myra Melford, piano. Palmetto PM2129.

*The Open Air Meeting*. Marty Ehrlich, reeds; Muhal Richard Abrams, piano. New World Records 80512-2.

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## **A TRUMPET IN THE MORNING**

1. *Prelude: Agbekor Translations* (2012) 3:29  
*Soloist:* Michael Dessen, trombone
  
2. *A Trumpet in the Morning* (2004) 23:21  
poem by Arthur Brown (1948–1982)  
J.D. Parran, saxophone soloist and reader
  
3. *Blues for Peace* (2009) 11:07  
*Soloists:* Jerome Harris, Ray Anderson, Uri Caine, Jason Robinson, Matt Wilson
  
4. *Rundowns and Turnbacks* (2007/2012) 20:22
  - I. The Ship on the Corner
  - II. Rundowns  
*Soloists:* Ray Anderson, James Zollar, Jerome Harris, Curtis Fowlkes
  - III. This Graceful Waltz  
*Soloists:* Jerome Harris, John Clark
  - IV. “Didn’t Know the Levees Would Break” Blues  
*Soloists:* Andy Laster, E.J. Allen, Michael Dessen, Eric McPherson
  - V. Quaker Work Song  
*Soloists:* Robert DeBellis, James Weidman
  - VI. Sugar for Sugar  
*Soloists:* Adam Kolker, Lisa Parrott
  - VII. Turnbacks
  
5. *M Variations (Melody for Madeleine)* (1992) 14:02  
*Soloists:* Uri Caine, Drew Gress, Adam Kolker, Ron Horton
  
6. *Postlude: Agbekor Translations* (2012) 2:47  
*Soloists:* Howard Johnson, E.J. Allen

TT: 75:24

## **Marty Ehrlich Large Ensemble**

Marty Ehrlich, conductor

J.D. Parran, narrator, soprano and bass saxophone (1, 2, 6)  
Andy Laster, alto sax (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)  
Robert DeBellis, alto and soprano sax, clarinet (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)  
Jason Robinson, tenor sax (1, 2, 3, 5, 6)  
Adam Kolker, tenor sax, clarinet (3, 4, 5)  
Marty Ehrlich, clarinet, bass clarinet (4)  
Howard Johnson, baritone sax (1, 2, 6)  
Lisa Parrott, baritone sax, bass clarinet (3, 4, 5)  
E.J. Allen, trumpet (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)  
Ron Horton, trumpet (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)  
James Zollar, trumpet (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)  
Miki Hirose, trumpet (5)  
John Clark, French horn (3, 4, 5)  
Ray Anderson, trombone (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)  
Michael Dessen, trombone (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)  
Curtis Fowlkes, trombone (3, 4, 5)  
Joseph Daley, tuba (1, 2, 6)  
James Weidman, piano (1, 2, 4, 6)  
Uri Caine, piano (3, 4, 5)  
Warren Smith, vibraphone, percussion (1, 2, 5)  
Jerome Harris, guitar, slide guitar (4, 5)  
Brad Jones, bass (1, 2, 4, 6)  
Drew Gress, bass (3, 4, 5)  
Eric McPherson, drums (1, 2, 4, 6)  
Matt Wilson, drums (3, 4, 5)

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“M Variations: Melody for Madeleine” was first performed by The New York Composer’s Orchestra (Robin Holcomb and Wayne Horvitz, musical directors).

“Agbekor Translations” was composed for a collaboration of the Hampshire College Jazz Improvisers Orchestra (Marty Ehrlich, musical director) and the Mt. Holyoke College West African Drumming Ensemble (Faith Conant, musical director).

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Francis Goelet (1926–1998), *In Memoriam*

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